

## DO THE TWO-STEP

There are really just two simple steps to effective participation in transportation projects:

**One**, do your research and find out what projects are out there and what they are about...what will they build? What impacts and benefits are expected? Then...

## "I'm not much of a public speaker"

**Two**, you don't have to make speeches in front of large groups of people in order to have your say. Get on a project mailing list so that you're aware of the latest developments. Read project reports. Then, draw a picture, write a letter, take a photo, send an email, cut out magazine articles about things implemented in other places, make a phone call, talk at a meeting, join a workshop.... Through your input, the NHDOT strives to achieve full and fair participation of all affected communities.

### Other pieces in the Citizen's Guide to Transportation series include:

#1 Having Your Say in transportation projects that shape your community

#2 Planning the Future of New Hampshire Transportation

#4 Access Management

#5 Transportation Enhancement Program

#6 Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program

#7 The Transportation/Land Use Relationship

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## Environmental Streamlining

Congress included provisions within TEA-21 legislation requiring the USDOT to promote a coordinated environmental review process with other Federal agencies. The intent of such environmental streamlining is "to address concerns relating to delays in implementing projects, unnecessary duplication of effort, and added costs often associated with the conventional process for reviewing and approving surface transportation projects", while maintaining protection of the environment.

Key elements associated with environmental streamlining include:

- Emphasizing concurrent, rather than sequential, environmental reviews to advance projects according to cooperatively determined time frames.
- Establishing a dispute resolution process to resolve issues that might otherwise create delays in the environmental permitting process.
- Allowing State environmental agencies the option of having their environmental reviews take place concurrently with the federal agencies' environmental review process.
- Authorizing State DOTs to reimburse Federal environmental agencies for expenses associated with meeting expedited time frames.
- Allowing State DOTs to procure the services of a single consultant team to prepare environmental documents for a project, as well as subsequent engineering and design work.
- Allowing State or local transportation agencies to award design-build contracts for qualified projects.
- Eliminating the major investment study as a separate requirement, and instead, promoting such studies to be integrated, as appropriate, as part of the overall project analysis.
- Allowing the value of land acquired by State or local governments without Federal assistance to be credited to the State's or local share of a Federally assisted project which uses that land.

[From FHWA Fact Sheet, "Environmental Streamlining", September 14, 1998].

The NHDOT is currently integrating new environmental streamlining initiatives into the I-93 Corridor Improvement Project between Salem and Manchester, NH. The I-93 study is examining widening designs as well as alternative mobility strategies for one of the busiest interstate highway corridors in northern New England. Together with State and Federal resource agencies, the NHDOT is striving to improve working relationships in an effort to reduce the permitting and environmental review time required to implement this large-scale, multi-jurisdictional planning and design effort. The hope is that the permitting process and project approvals can be expedited, and the procedures and lessons learned can be applied elsewhere on future projects within the State and across the country.

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New Hampshire Department of Transportation

### Citizen's Guide to Transportation Series

# PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

making transportation projects a reality



**Once a project is part of an approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), it enters an implementation phase. Transportation projects can vary widely in location, scope, cost, environmental issues and public interest. In order to assure that a project's implementation is safe, efficient, economical and environmentally compatible, there is a fairly standardized project development process that includes regular opportunities for public input.**

The project development process can vary among different projects, depending on the size, complexity and potential impacts of the project. Projects utilizing federal funds are subject to federal guidelines, and are formally classified as outlined in the chart at right. Projects without federal funding are not formally classified, but are processed in a similar manner depending on their size, complexity, and magnitude of impact.

Those projects that are likely to have minor impacts typically do not require:

- as extensive an alternative analysis and preliminary design study;
- as rigorous an environmental evaluation; or,
- as involved a public participation process.

Those projects with greater impacts must be scrutinized to a greater degree. The classification process is used to provide a framework for considering to what degree a project is evaluated.

In terms of public participation, it is important to the NHDOT to understand the needs and concerns of local and regional officials, property owners, businesses and the general public.

Forums for public input include:

- Public officials meetings;
- Public informational meetings;
- Workshop meetings with local boards or groups;

NEPA PROJECT CLASSIFICATION	GENERAL SCOPE OF WORK	PROCESS	PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
Class I	Large scale construction in a new location or involving substantial widening, with anticipation significant environmental impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be published in the Federal Register (available in public libraries)</li><li>• Requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to be approved by the lead by federal agency</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public advertisement of EIS availability</li><li>• 45-day comment period and Hearing on Draft Report</li></ul>
Class II "Categorical Exclusion" ("CE")	Minor projects, including resurfacing, restoration, reconstruction, safety, transportation enhancement, congestion, mitigation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Because they have no significant environmental impact, no EIS or Environmental Assessment (EA) is required (Note: NHDOT does prepare a lesser detailed environmental study)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Notify town officials</li></ul>
Class III	Major reconstruction or minor relocation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An Environmental Assessment is prepared to determine if an EIS is required</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public advertisement of report availability</li><li>• 30-day comment period</li></ul>

- Charrettes, or design workshops;
- Advisory task force meetings; and,
- Meetings with individuals

The types of meetings and the number of meetings is driven to some degree by the size, complexity and potential project impacts, as well as by public interest or concern. The NHDOT is accessible by phone, by mail, and by e-mail for commentary outside of meetings.

The project development process includes multiple phases or steps. For small projects or projects with limited impacts, the steps tend to run together and feature fewer milestones. For larger projects with greater impacts, the steps are more defined and the milestones more pronounced, as the number of issues to be tracked require more organization.

# PROJECT DEVELOPMENT:

## Making transportation projects a reality



- 1 **Project Scoping/Data Collection/Coordination**
- 2 **Preliminary Engineering Studies/Environmental Evaluation**
- 3 **Identification of a Preferred Alternative/Draft Environmental Documentation**
- 4 **Formal Public Hearing Process**
- 5 **Selected Alternative/Final Environmental Documentation**
- 6 **Development of Project Construction Plans/Acquisition of Right-of-Way**
- 7 **Construction of Project**

### ■ Project Scoping/Data Collection/Coordination

As a first step in developing a specific project, a number of activities are required to sort out what the project might involve and how it might best be managed. What the project is intended to address and what the parameters, study area, limits, possible outcomes—that is, the scope of the project—might be, need to be estimated and proposed. Data in the form of ground survey, user surveys, traffic counts, resource identification, existing infrastructure condition, etc., must be collected and catalogued. Coordination efforts with local officials, state and federal agencies, planning commissions, user groups, utilities, residents, businesses and the public must be initiated to further understand the scope of the project and how it should be pursued.

### ■ Preliminary Engineering Studies/Environmental Evaluation

With some idea as to the project objective and scope, and with basic data available about existing conditions and potential future no-build conditions, and with coordination/outreach initiated, conceptual engineering concepts are developed. The concepts are intended to be rough outlines of possible solutions for consideration by environmental agencies, planning commissions, local officials,

abutters and the general public. The concepts involve design layouts with some level of evaluation as to the environmental and property impacts. As the design concepts are developed further, presentations to the resource agencies and the public are conducted to obtain input. As the concepts are refined, the project impacts are evaluated through an iterative process. The number of iterations is dependent on the size and complexity of the project and the magnitude of impact the project might have on the environment, the abutters, the community, and the region. As the design and environmental process unfolds, a project is classified according to the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) criteria shown in the table (see first page).

### ■ Identification of Preferred Alternative/Draft Environmental Documentation

Based on information generated by the conceptual design studies and through public comment and environmental review, the NHDOT carefully assesses each alternative. For large, complex projects there may be a number of

alternatives. For smaller projects or projects utilizing existing infrastructure, the alternatives may consist more of design options specific to critical locations. As the alternatives and options are evaluated and screened, one alternative is identified as the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative is essentially the NHDOT's recommendation based on its ability to address short and long term needs, to minimize impacts to resources and properties, to be permitted, to be funded, and to garner local and regional support. This alternative then becomes the focus of further design and environmental documentation. Other alternatives are not necessarily discarded and forgotten, but they are put on hold to some degree, as the preferred alternative is further scrutinized.



Public Hearings are held for larger projects, as part of the Project Development Process.

### ■ Selected Alternative/Final Environmental Documentation

As described in the public hearing phase, approval of a project from state officials comes from the panel chairing the public hearing, and is contingent on the panel's concurrence with the NHDOT's response to issues raised at the public hearing. While NHDOT addresses the panel's interests, the NHDOT also coordinates with state and federal agencies to address issues of concern that were raised as part of the public hearing process or resulted from review of the draft environmental document. The outcome of this effort is the issuance of the final environmental documentation and subsequent project approvals or permits.

### ■ Development of Project Construction Plans/Acquisition of Right-of-Way

Approval of environmental documents means the project may advance to the final design process. Based on the design shown in environmental documents, which is preliminary in nature, engineers and other designers further refine the details of the design, addressing:

- roadway alignment
- grading and drainage
- landscaping and aesthetics
- material selection
- architectural and structural design
- utilities and utility relocations
- environmental permitting and mitigation
- construction phasing and methods
- traffic control
- other disciplines, as appropriated

The design team prepares construction drawings and specifications to ensure high quality and efficient construction.

Within final design, the process of acquiring right-of-way begins with the preparation of precise drawings defining areas to be

acquired. These plans allow the financial appraisal of the impact of the project on adjacent properties.

During the appraisal process, NHDOT sends an appraiser to each affected property, and the property owner has the opportunity to accompany the appraiser during the inspection of the property. The appraiser submits a report to NHDOT, where it is reviewed for accuracy and quality. The report is then given to NHDOT agents who negotiate with the owners and explain acquisition procedures.

If relocation is necessary, relocation assistance is available as explained in the NHDOT guide "Public Highways and Your Property". The booklet is available during public hearings to explain options for advisory and financial assistance to those being relocated.

### ■ Construction of Project

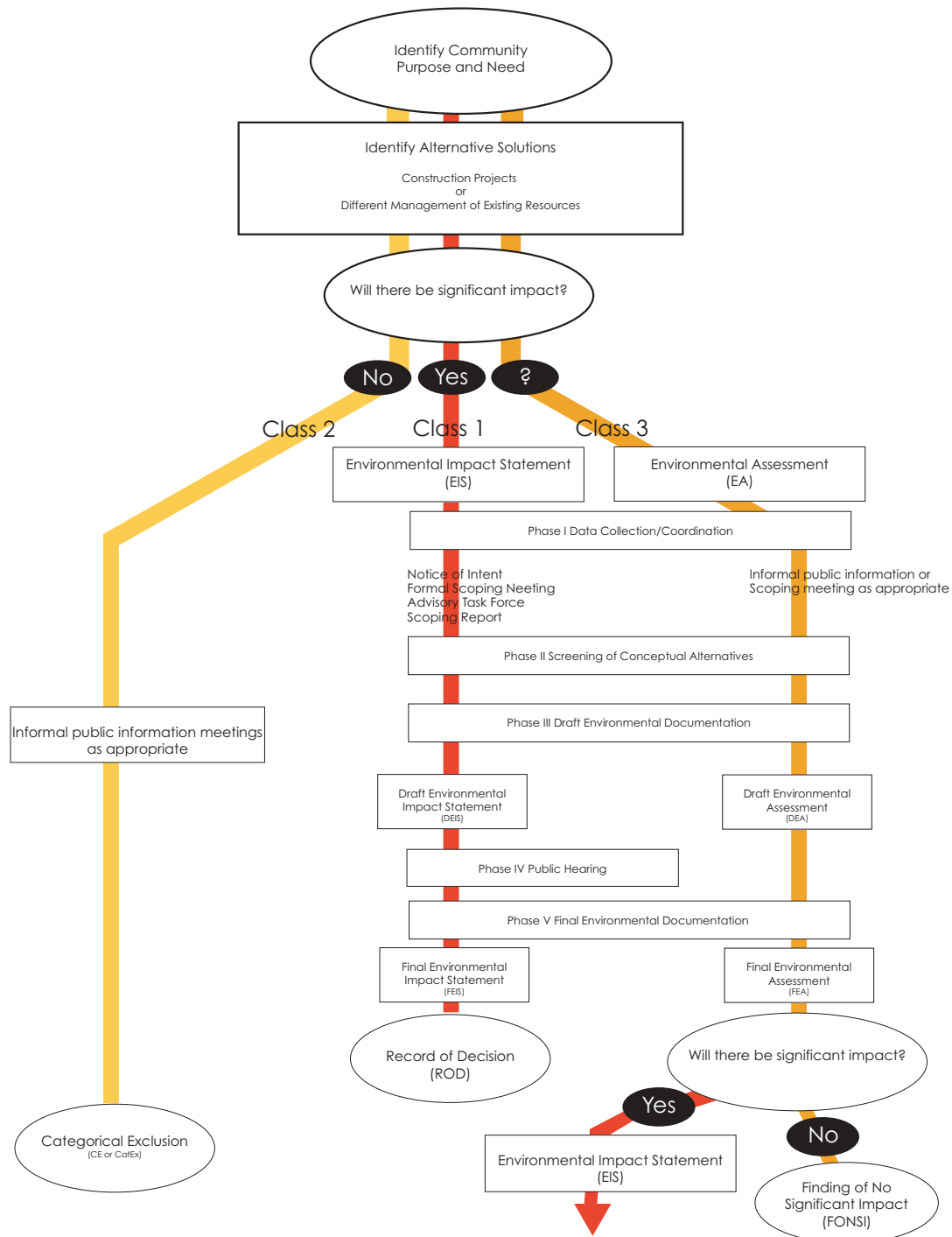
The construction process may introduce its own effects on a community, which require temporary rerouting of traffic, erosion controls, alternate pedestrian paths and safety protection. NHDOT continues its coordination with local officials including police and fire, state and federal agencies and the public throughout the construction process. NHDOT personnel are on-site to supervise the contractor, enforce quality, safety and environmental standards, ensure project commitments, and to serve as a direct conduit for communications with the public.





# PROJECT DEVELOPMENT:

## Preliminary Design and Environmental Evaluation



with attribution to FHWA's A Citizens Guide to Transportation Decisionmaking

# Making transportation projects a reality



## ■ Formal Public Hearing Process

For Class II type projects where impacts are minimal, formal public hearings are generally not required. In some situations the NHDOT may place a notice offering an "Opportunity for a Public Hearing". In this case, a written request for a hearing must be received within fifteen (15) days, or no hearing will be held and the project will proceed. This procedure is used only if project impacts are relatively minor in nature, as is the case with Class II type projects.

For Class I and III type projects, formal public hearings are typically required. The public hearing provides a formal opportunity to receive comments and questions relating to the preferred alternative, as well as other alternatives and design options. These comments are addressed in the final environmental document, and in the case of NHDOT projects (as opposed to projects under municipal jurisdiction), in a document called the Report of the Commissioner. Comments received can also be reflected in the approved (or selected) alternative when further study demonstrates the merits of the ideas contained in the comments received.

At a hearing, there is a presiding panel composed of members of the Executive Council, or others appointed by the Governor and the Executive Council. For local transportation projects, the presiding panel is composed of town, city or state officials. When a project comes under the jurisdiction of the US Army Corps of Engineers or other agencies due to environmental effects, a joint hearing with these agencies may be held to meet parallel public participation requirements. The agenda for a hearing is generally like this:

NHDOT presents the need for the project and a synopsis of alternatives. Social, economic, cultural and natural environmental effects of the proposal and alternatives, as well as the potential necessity for land acquisition or relocations, are also addressed in the presentation.

Public testimony is received and becomes part of the transcript of the hearing. Written comments are accepted,

generally for up to ten days after the hearing, and those also become part of the official testimony on the project.

Following the public hearing and receipt of written comments, a transcript of oral and written testimony is prepared. For projects under state jurisdiction, the NHDOT prepares a report describing the proposed layout. The report also provides a listing of issues, concerns, and requests contained in the transcript and a discussion of how the NHDOT would address those items. This report, called the Report of the Commissioner, serves as a response to the issues raised as part of the public hearing, and serves as basis for the presiding panel to "find occasion for the layout"; or in other words, approve the project based on the layout in the Report and how issues will be addressed.



Public hearings or other public presentations of project information are your chance to help integrate transportation facilities into the rural environment.

With the Report in hand, the presiding panel holds a meeting to review the project, and to discuss the NHDOT's response to comments, and adjustments to the layout. The meeting is open to the public, although public testimony is not taken. As an outcome of the meeting the project is approved or not approved, or in some cases approval is withheld pending further consideration of issues and potential changes in the layout or the Department's response to issues.